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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the American immigrant experience, discusses the process of acculturation, and recounts the evolution to a value of cultural pluralism from the melting pot concept, as background to a consideration of the problem of educating the adult immigrant in the U.S., focused specifically on the current U.S. immigration experience with Indochinese refugees. Distinctions are drawn between immigrants and refugees, the latter being defined as immigrants with special needs which are recognized by special allocation of national resources and special initial transition programs. The special allocation on behalf of the Indochinese refugees is briefly delineated, and the Indochinese experience is considered as an application of the acculturation model presented earlier in the paper. The Indochinese resettlement system, based upon (1) a philosophy of avoiding dependency and making Indochinese active community members and (2) a policy of national dispersion of refugees, is outlined and described as working quite well. Beneath the debate which continues over the rate of immigration is a national commitment to the immigrant experience and to the element of discovery, an important aspect of immigration which, when supported by the value of cultural pluralism, is essential to the socialization of a nation. (Author/AJ)

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# IMMIGRATION

# AS THE UNITED STATES NATIONAL EXPERIENCE

by

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Remarks at International Seminar: Education of Adult Immigrants, National Institute of Adult Education, Cheshire, England. January 21, 1976.

## IMMIGRATION AS THE UNITED STATES NATIONAL EXPERIENCE

### Introductory

The education of United States immigrants might be considered a special subdivision of U.S. formal and informal education, both adult and child-centered; or it might be considered as the U.S. educational experience itself. Based on the literature with which I am familiar, it is most often viewed as the U.S. educational experience.

The story is told that our President Franklin Delano Roosevelt once remarked to a group of The Daughters of the American Revolution -- a very heritage-conscious group indeed -- that "we must remember, ladies, that we all are the sons and daughters of immigrants."

The United States, since its inception into nationhood, has had only two hundred years to move several generations away from some of its original immigrant founders. To be sure, we have by now had an opportunity to produce the native-born individual, someone we might label as an "American." But we have never in fact ceased being a nation of immigrants, and as successive waves of newcomers have entered our society we can look at both our past and our present and see evident an educational system as much conceived for the purposes of socialization and assimilation as for the purposes of schooling children and adults in the fundamentals.

The U.S. Immigration Experience

Before focusing on and interpreting the U.S. experience with educating the adult immigrant, it will be helpful to understand some facts affecting the immigrant experience. The following table illustrates the rate of immigration:

| Period | Number of Immigrants | Dominant Origins | U.S. Population | % of Immigrant Population |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1776-1880 | 10,000,000+ | Northwestern Europe | 50,156,000 | ½% |
| 1880-1917 | 22,500,000 | Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe | 105,710,000 | ½% |
| | (1907-1917 - Annual rate exceeded 1,000,000 per year) | | | |
| 1972 | 360,000 (legal)<br>500,000 (illegal) | | 209,000,000 | ½ % |
| 1973 | 360,000 (legal)<br>700,000 (illegal) | | 210,000,000 | ½ % |
| 1974 | 395,000 (legal)<br>800,000 (illegal) | | 211,000,000 | ½% |

A study recently announced by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service indicates there are currently eight million illegal immigrants in the U.S. Five of the eight million are reportedly from Mexico with three million from other countries.

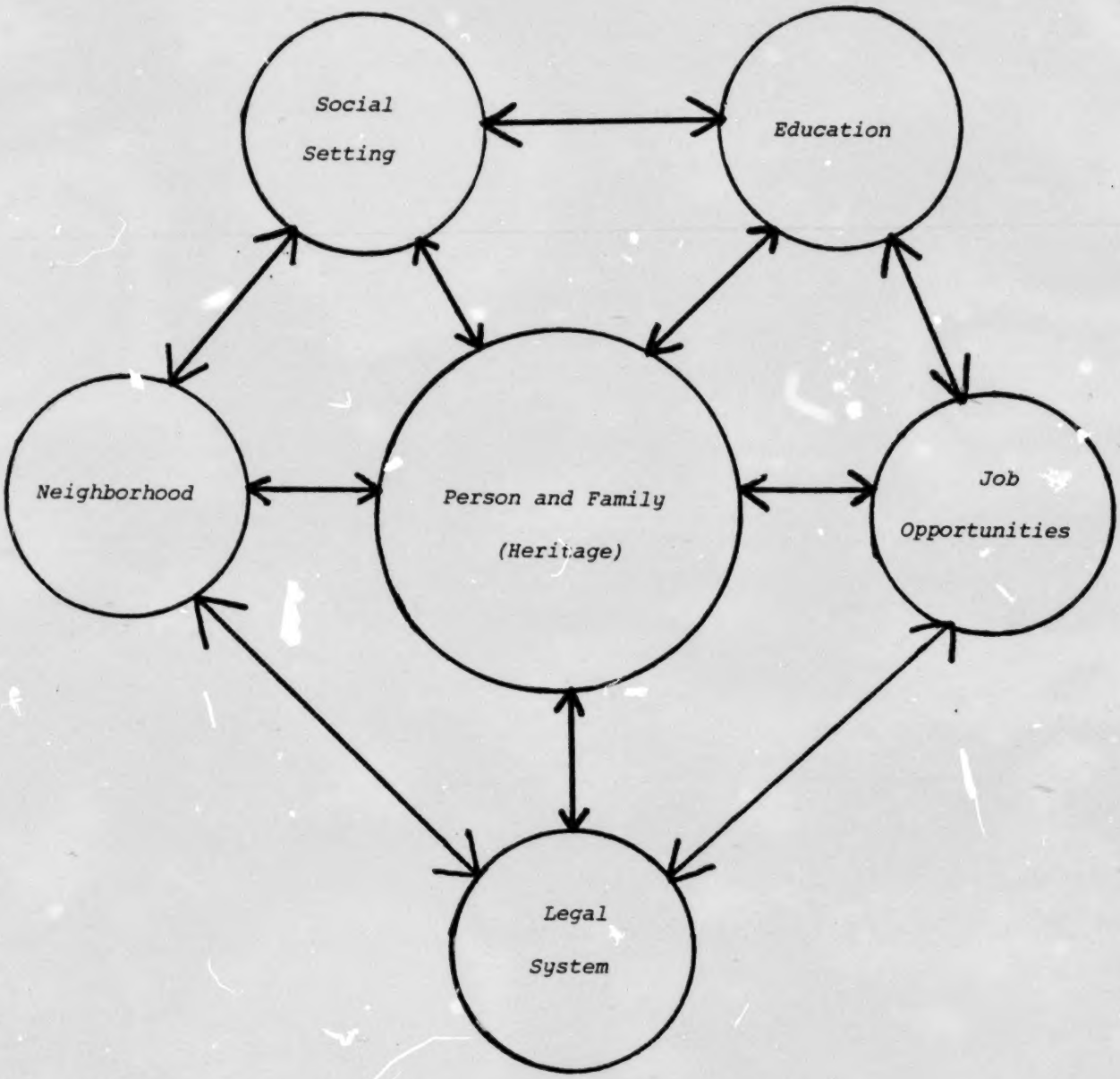
While figures are not available at this time for 1975, we can, I think, assume it will be comparable to those of 1974 plus 130,000 Indochinese refugees. Later I will comment at some length about the Indochinese refugee experience.

A qualifying note is in order concerning the last column of this chart. The process of acculturation requires time. There is no way of accurately specifying or, to my knowledge, of generalizing how long the process requires. But clearly, most immigrants, especially those who enter the United States with little or no ability to speak our language, require a considerable period of time. Therefore, the annual number of immigrants, up to a point, are cumulative as a percentage of the total population. If, for example, we take a 25-year cumulation, in the case of the United States, the immigrant population might be something like 10 percent of the total population, depending upon one's criteria for determining acculturation. In fact, of the 1969 total population of around 200,000,000, 11,000,000 claimed foreign birth in that year alone.

Acculturation: The Total Learning Process

Acculturation is the process by which culture traits are modified by contacts between peoples having different ways of life. It refers to the incorporation of the immigrant into the dominant culture, his or her adapting to the society entered. But it also refers to the impact which immigrants have on the dominant culture, and, as we have experienced it in the United States, this is a highly significant factor in our still-evolving national culture. One cannot speak intelligently of the contribution of education to the acculturation of the immigrant outside the context of the larger learning process. This larger learning process takes into consideration other learning experiences which

significantly facilitate or, in some situations, retard the immigrant's adaptation to and adoption of the dominant culture. This process can be represented as follows:




*DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION OF ACCULTURATION*

*(INTERACTIVE SYSTEM)*

The person and the family are depicted as the center of the process, since I am here focussing primarily on the acculturation of the adult immigrant. The person and the family arrive in the new society with a heritage. This heritage acts upon and is influenced by the larger society, depicted here by the five outer circles. These are: the neighborhood; the social setting, by which is designated the broader area of social contacts including church and other community contacts; the education system, meaning that formal program designed to teach the immigrant new skills and knowledge; job opportunities and job experiences which usually involve an identifiably different socialization process; and lastly, the legal system including both the naturalization requirements and the possible penalty of deportation as well as citizen rights as understood and interpreted on behalf of the immigrant.

The arrows are drawn to visualize the interactive nature of acculturation. Each element acts upon the immigrant, upon each other, and the immigrant interacts with these elements. Education is only an element, and, in my opinion, most often seeks to aid the immigrant in adapting to the other elements. Also implicit in this pictorial is the principle that acculturation is more decisively influenced by the broader values of the culture and the social systems manifesting these values, than by the contributions of the education system.

Viewed in the context of this interactive model, I would like to comment in some detail on our experience in the United States involving the acculturation of the adult immigrant.

The Melting Pot

For many years, primarily in the last century, there was a notion that America represented a "Melting Pot" for its immigrant populations: that somehow, new arrivals could be thrown into a social kettle and stewed into becoming Americans.

Thankfully, we have moved beyond the Melting Pot idea. It was an unfortunate metaphor for the U.S. experience for many reasons, not the least of which was the license it gave our rabid elements to disparage he itages and to attempt to blot out cultural, social, and linguistic differences. The murky waters of the Melting Pot idea hid many ingredients which were added to the immigrant situation in the U.S.: restrictive legislation, such as a literacy test for entrance to the United States, passed in 1918, and the national origin quotas set in 1921. These were political responses to social and intellectual controversies questioning the need for further acceptance of immigrants into the United States. Much of this controversy focussed on questioning the abilities of certain Europeans to be assimilated into U.S. life.

The old view regarded the immigrant essentially as an "outsider" -- an intruder to something called American life. Our programs for immigrants betrayed this attitude through their very nomenclature. Programs were funded and conducted under the title: "Americanization Program."

In viewing the "Americanization" phenomenon historically, two factors emerge as significant. First, the immigration rates already cited. These assured, if not a melting pot, at least a continuing injection of culturally and socially diverse persons. Secondly, the

absence of a longstanding, stabilized culture. A stable and traditional culture is usually more resistive to persons who are "different." A culture built from immigration more readily accommodates differences, whether through a melting pot rationale or some other.

Pluralism

Oscar Handlin, an American sociologist and himself a son of an immigrant family, has observed that the very fact of immigrant America, a society composed of many societies and social ethics, led to the development and refinement of a system which was forced to recognize the fact of pluralism. "A society compelled to tolerate a multitude of significant differences had to develop in a pluralistic fashion, recognizing the right of each group to function in its own fashion within the loose constraints of citizenship and the underlying democratic ethos upon which the nation was founded. Hence this society had to give its broadest sectors of activity over to voluntary, rather than compulsory, organization." Handlin goes on to point out, "The logical corollary of pluralism in a free society is the abstention by government from interference" in those areas where the points of view of the people are not homogenous. This continual process of non-intervention and readjustment can be viewed in most U.S. social institutions.

In U.S. parlance, the melting pot metaphor has, during the past 20 years, been severely discredited. It has been replaced by the concept of cultural pluralism, a concept which encourages preservation

of heritages and acceptance of differences. This change of cultural values has extensive and significant implications for education. Few, if any, observers of the U.S. scene challenge that a major objective of the U.S. public education system of the 19th and early 20th centuries was, in the words of the U.S. political scientist, Stephen Bailey, "to make an immigrant population into Americans." We have already noted the significance of "Americanization" programs for immigrants in this regard.

From the nation's beginning through the era of the First World War the United States practiced a form of assimilation which was based on a negative process of denationalization, compelling the immigrant for the most part to give up his heritage. It was practiced cheerfully and with the self-assurance that it was the correct approach. The "Magic Formula" for Americanization, according to Franklin K. Lane, was this: "one part ability to read, write, and speak English; one part the Declaration of Independence; one part the Constitution; one part love for apple pie; one part desire and willingness to wear American shoes; and another part pride in American plumbing will make an American of anyone."

More seriously, this approach of coerced adoption of national customs and appearances was both unsuccessful and misguided. If assimilation is the forced adoption of Anglo-Saxon modes of life, including social methods, dress, customs, and a language, then it becomes a test of abilities to imitate. The persons most likely to

be assimilated in such a fashion are those whose own culture is closest to the norm or relatively shallow or whose own background is unlettered and unsophisticated. Those with the cultural traditions which are extensive and developed cannot assimilate. They can only condescend to pretend. This is not citizenship; it is coping.

A significantly more humane approach involves a reciprocal enrichment process which regards the immigrant as someone with something to offer. We cannot deny that the newcomer is greatly disadvantaged, initially, whatever his background and culture. It is crucial for him to learn to make his way in the new environment. But the society which receives the newcomer can also profit from new points of view, fresh insights, and the enrichment accomplished through adapting as well as adopting.

The shift from the melting pot value to that of cultural pluralism was both commemorated and catapulted by the U.S. Supreme Court Decision of 1954 on the right of minorities to equal education opportunities. This decision in effect recognized that the melting pot principle had not provided adequate educational opportunities for minorities, especially those of non-white origin. It declared that separate school systems were inherently unequal.

This decision signaled, on the one hand, the readiness of the U.S. system to acknowledge that the melting pot metaphor had served its purpose but lost its usefulness (it must be understood that the Supreme Court does not initiate cases; it only judges on the constitutional and legislative rights involved). On the other hand, the decision required

systematic changes in how the needs of minorities would be met and how their rights would be assured. Let us not overlook the fact that all immigrants are minorities, at least for a period of time.

The movement from cultural assimilation to cultural pluralism was manifested in social legislation of the early 1960's. In 1967, the Bilingual Education Act was passed. Subsequently amended, it currently reads:

> ". . . the Congress declares it to be the policy of the United States, in order to establish equal educational opportunity for all children (A) to encourage the establishment and operation, where appropriate, of educational programs using bilingual educational practices, techniques, and methods, and (B) for that purpose, to provide financial assistance to local educational agencies, and to State educational agencies for certain purposes, in order to enable such local educational agencies to develop and carry out such programs in elementary and secondary schools, including activities at the preschool level, which are designed to meet the educational needs of such children; and to demonstrate effective ways of providing, for children of limited English-speaking ability, instruction designed to enable them, while using their native language, to achieve competence in the English language."

In 1974, the Adult Education Act, which since its passage in 1966 has always supported language training for those adults not proficient in English, was amended as follows:

> ". . . provide that special assistance be given to the needs of persons of limited English-speaking ability . . . by providing bilingual adult education programs in which instruction is given in English and, to the extent necessary to allow such persons to progress effectively through the adult education program, in the native language of such persons, carried out in coordination with programs of bilingual education assisted under such title VII and bilingual vocational education programs under the Vocational Education Act of 1963 . . ."

Prior to the Bilingual Education Act and its subsequent amendments, it was U.S. parlance to speak of "English as a Second Language." The transition from this phrase to that of bilingual education perhaps symbolized, in educational terms, the movement from melting pot to cultural pluralism.

In 1971, a national conference sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education was held. The theme of this conference was: Cultural Pluralism in Education: A Mandate for Change. I will quote only one citation from the proceedings, by a colleague of mine in the U.S. Office, Bruce Gaarder:

> "Cultural pluralism is not an assimilative posture; it is a negation of assimilation. It is a posture which maintains

> that there is more than one legitimate way of being human without paying the penalties of second-class citizenship, and that this pluralism would enrich and strengthen the nation. Social justice, alone, means a fair share of the pie; as a goal in the United States it has usually meant an assimilative attitude. Cultural pluralism, on the other hand, calls unavoidably for a pluralistic viewpoint; it demands the same fair share plus the right not to assimilate."

Educating the Adult Immigrant in the U.S.

What then is the U.S. experience in educating the adult immigrant and what may we learn from it for the purposes of this seminar?

First, the primary emphasis in immigrant adult education in the U.S. has been on language training for those adults who did not enter the culture with a working knowledge of English. The dictum: "Language is culture" has been adhered to in practice long before it was subscribed to in theory. Language training was consciously viewed as the essential skill in being able to function in the United States. On a less conscious level, it was viewed as the immigrant's acceptance of the culture, of his "Americanization."

Historically speaking, the content of immigrant adult education has concentrated on citizenship education, i.e., upon assisting the immigrant in legally qualifying for full citizenship. While acquiring other skills and knowledge was not totally ignored, to a large extent it was frequently left to the auspices of social systems other than education.

Beginning in 1968, special educational programs for immigrants were discontinued as far as Federal funding was concerned. This phenomenon perhaps signalled, at the national level, the move from the melting pot value to cultural pluralism. It can, at least, be viewed as treating the immigrant's needs no differently from other indigenous groups whose first language was not English.

In place of immigrant education, we find, beginning with Federal legislation in 1963, basic education for all adults whose inability to read, write, and speak the English language constituted a major impediment to employment and to meeting their adult responsibilities.

Immigrant education was thereby replaced by basic education. Federal support for basic education for adults currently stands at $67.5 million a year with State and local funds reported at approximately $27.5 million additional. Of this total of $95 million, approximately 30 percent is spent in teaching "English as a Second Language." Throughout basic education, whether ESL or for those for whom English is the first language, educational content centers around life-related skills and knowledge. A recent research study funded by the U.S. Office of Education requiring four years for its completion has identified those skills and knowledges which an adult is required to possess if that person is to be able to function in the United States, if that person is to be able to "cope" with everyday requirements. This study will be used as one of the foundations for developing

curriculum in basic education and will influence the educational content offered both to native and immigrant adults.

What is our experience with teacher training in educating adult immigrants? The high percentage of effort applied during the past decade to English as a Second Language programs has resulted in a significant emphasis on teaching ESL skills and on developing special language materials. The content of special materials for classroom use has increasingly been in the direction of life-related skills. However, the emphasis has remained on cognitive, rather than affective skill development.

Teacher training programs for ESL teachers have increasingly sought to increase the teacher's understanding of cross-cultural differences and how to deal with these. They too, however, have dealt with cross-cultural differences more in the cognitive rather than the affective mode. One off-setting factor in this trend has been the cultural pluralism initiative which has included a demand for teachers of the same ethnic and racial heritage as the heritage of those being taught. In areas of ethnic and racial population concentration, this movement has had a significant effect. In other areas lacking ethnic population concentration it has stimulated cross-cultural training for teachers.

## The Current U.S. Immigration Experience: Indochinese Refugees

In December 1975, the last of some 130,000 Indochinese refugees left specially activated resettlement centers to join communities.

This phenomenon, both for its currency and its contrasting cultural experience, may be a useful case study for the purposes of this seminar. But, first, an observation about the refugee phenomenon in the United States. I find it quite significant that in the United States we distinguish readily between an immigrant and a refugee. It seems that a refugee is an immigrant deserving of special consideration, or from another perspective, an alien requiring special treatment before being seen as capable of functioning as an immigrant. The refugee phenomenon has at least these three characteristics: (1) national recognition that the refugee has special needs; (2) a special allocation of national resources to help meet these needs; and (3) special programs which seek to make the initial transition easier.

The United States has experienced three waves of refugees in the past three decades, and these characteristics have been evident in all three: the Hungarian refugees of the 1950's, the Cuban refugees of the 1960's, and the current Indochinese refugees.

I shall briefly delineate the special allocation of resources on behalf of the Indochinese refugees. In addition to resources directed to transporting the refugees, $100 million was provided for the health, education, and welfare needs of the some 130,000 Indochinese. Approximately $65 million of this went to providing income maintenance, for the period between entrance and self-sufficiency. Another $15 million went for health care. The final $20 million was directed for education.

Of the $20 million available for education, approximately $8 million was used for transitional education programs for refugees while in the resettlement centers. To aid the effectiveness of these programs and those subsequently supported in local communities, a $1 million technical assistance program was sponsored for materials identification and development, and for rapid consultation with State and local sponsoring agencies. $6 million was designated for aid to elementary and secondary schools experiencing a significant influx of Indochinese children, and $5 million was designated for adult education. Approximately 67,000 of the 130,000 refugees were adults, age 18 and over.

The funds made available for adult education were added to the adult basic education program already nationally supported by a previous $67.5 million allocation. This ongoing program was seen as a viable delivery system for adult education and as the system which would be responsible for the further education of Indochinese adults. It was readily ascertained that $5 million would not cover the cost of language and acculturation education for this group; thus, the money was viewed as a supplement to that adult education system which would ultimately provide the services. State and local funds would, hopefully, provide the addition needed.

The current Indochinese experience provides an interesting application of the acculturation model which I earlier presented. The Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975, an emergency legislation which provided funds for Indochinese resettlement, did

not specify an administrative framework or philosophy. As a consequence, the system was entirely derived by the Federal administration building upon past experience with immigrants and other refugee groups.

The overriding philosophy upon which the Indochinese resettlement system was based was that of avoiding dependency and toward making Indochinese active members of the English-speaking community as early as feasible. A policy of national dispersion of refugees was adopted. An administrative principle flowing from the philosophy was that no camps or reservations would be utilized on a continuous basis. Four military facilities were identified and utilized as transitional areas.

A Government Interagency Task Force for Indochinese Refugees was constituted and served as a policy-making and interpreting group. It was composed of representatives of such Federal agencies as the Immigration Service, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Department of State, Department of Defense, and others.

Voluntary agencies, with identifiable capability and experience in providing services to immigrants, were selected as principal organizations to manage the resettlement process. Eight national voluntary organizations, including church-related organizations such as United States Catholic Conference and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and such private organizations as International Rescue Committee, Inc. and American Council for Nationalities Service, were selected and funded at the rate of $500 per refugee. Their principal responsibilities were to identify potential sponsors of

Indochinese, usually among the organization's client-groups, and to match the sponsors to Indochinese individuals or families. Each organization had resident representatives at the four resettlement centers who primarily performed diagnostic and counseling services. The voluntary agencies were also responsible for maintaining contact with refugees to assist in any problems arising during the period of sponsorship. This system resulted in meeting an original objective inasmuch as refugees are widely dispersed throughout the United States.

Sponsors of Indochinese refugees agreed to assist in finding employment and to provide temporary food, clothing, shelter, and minor medical services until refugees became self-supporting. However, the sponsor relationship was a purely voluntary one and involved no legal contract or obligation. While no additional funds were provided the sponsor, the voluntary organization was free to pass on a portion or all of the $500 per individual. In all cases some funds were passed on and in a significant number of cases the total $500 per refugee was passed on to the sponsor. As a group, churches with their local parishes or organizations were the principal sponsors. In addition, businesses, a few colleges, and a number of families served as sponsors. The greatest number of problems occurred among family sponsors, particularly when the Indochinese family shared the same housing facilities as the sponsor. Voluntary organizations provided briefings to sponsors and an orientation pamphlet but this did not suffice to resolve cultural conflicts when a U.S. family and Indochinese family shared the same household.

Significant additional services were provided by such organizations as the Red Cross at the resettlement centers. To illustrate, one important service was the translation of diplomas, licenses, birth certificates, and transcripts from Vietnamese into English to assist the refugees and the sponsors in identifying and transferring knowledge and competencies.

In retrospect, this system appears to be working quite well, providing a variety of accommodation mechanisms between the host society and members of an alien culture. Experience with this approach indicates some improvements could be made in standardizing the amount of money available to sponsors, in establishing minimal follow-up responsibilities of voluntary agencies, and in more carefully delineating jurisdictions among voluntary agencies toward reducing rivalry. However, these revisions are not systemic but rather relate to refining the system.

## Conclusion

What can we in the United States conclude from immigration as a national experience? The evolution from melting pot to cultural pluralism, already cited, is itself a conclusion. We have concluded that cultural differences welded together at points essential to fabricating a viable, productive system constitute a more humane and effective society.

The debate continues over the rate of immigration: What should it be for the present and for the future? A significant issue is that of rates of immigration, especially as these relate to certain areas,

particularly the African nations. But beneath this debate is a commitment to the immigrant experience and to the element of discovery as an important aspect of immigration. Each immigrant is an explorer, at least in a limited sense. His life has been changed irrevocably, and he is open to new experience if he is not shunned, misunderstood, or rejected. This predisposition is a rich resource if we recognize and build upon it. We are also rapidly concluding that this sense of discovery, when supported by the value of cultural pluralism, is essential to the socialization of a nation. Because I have not required my Arab, Vietnamese, or African neighbor who is by choice my fellow countryman to be different, I am better able to live internationally with others who are different.

Finally, I would like to offer the following observations for further testing and discussion during this seminar:

1. The immigrant experience is an interactive one.
2. The interaction between the immigrant person and the society is more determinant than any formal education program devised for the benefit of the immigrant.
3. Immigrant education programs are most effective when developed to assist the immigrant in understanding and assimilating his experiences in the larger society. This has implications both for curriculum content and methodology.
4. Immigrant education programs must also attend to educating the population-at-large for change; it must educate them to

be open and accepting of the newcomer and to learn from their new experiences provided by the immigrant.

5. The immigrant is a special kind of migrant in a migratory world. Microcosmically, he provides an opportunity to examine the impact of mobility on the individual, the family, and the community. Macrocosmically, he provides that opportunity in relation to the nation, the culture, and the world.

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